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Kant's Transcendental Deduction, by Henry Allison. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015. Pp. Xv + 477.

The purpose of this book, by one of the foremost contemporary Kant scholars, is to advance a simultaneously ‘analytic and historical’ treatment of the most complex component of Kant’s philosophy: the Transcendental Deduction (p. 1). The approach is analytic in that Allison seeks to provide a rigorous assessment of the multiple lines of argument visible in Kant’s text. It is historical in that this is embedded within a detailed exegetical framework: Allison considers, often line by line, a huge range of sources, beginning with the Prize Essay before moving through the A Deduction and the Prolegomena to the B Deduction. This interweaving of the textual and the conceptual makes the book immensely valuable: by closely tracking the development of Kant’s thought, from its emergence from rationalism through to the modifications implemented over the two editions of KrV, Allison provides a rich picture of the tensions and pressures which shape the Critical system. My aim is to provide an outline of Allison’s analysis, and to identify some challenges which his approach faces.

Before proceeding, some remarks on scope. The book is a long one – over four hundred and fifty pages. I cannot do justice here either to its richness, or to the field in which it is operating. There will therefore be three major limitations on what follows. First, I will focus on the philosophical side of Allison’s reading, rather than the textual details: many of these hang on individual lines which could, and sometimes have, merited a monograph each (for example, the infamous B160-1n). Second, I concentrate Allison’s treatment of the B Deduction since he, like the vast majority of commentators, regards this as best expression of Kant’s argument (Heidegger is the most influential dissenter). Third, I am not going to discuss transcendental idealism. Allison’s view is that the Deduction and Kant’s idealism are ‘inseparable’ (p. 453; also p. 286). As he acknowledges, this would suffice for many to constitute a *reductio* of the former – since Strawson, much of Anglophone Kant scholarship in particular has been predicated on disentangling the two. How one sees this issue obviously depends on what exactly transcendental idealism amounts to, something on which Allison has famous views, but which I cannot address here.

I begin with some background on Allison’s reading of the pre-Critical Kant, and on the structure of the B Deduction itself. I will then highlight four aspects of Allison’s discussion which seem both particularly interesting and potentially problematic.

The opening third of Allison's text offers a detailed and helpful analysis of Kant's intellectual development. Allison stresses three aspects of this trajectory, all of which seem rightly central. The first is Kant's struggle with the question of method. As Allison eloquently charts, the Kant of the early 1760s frames this in terms of a contrast between 'analytic' and 'synthetic' approaches, labels which have a very meaning from that which they will in KrV. The analytic method is effectively a regressive one, moving from the observation of particular events through to the rules or laws underlying them: the exemplar which Kant has in mind is, of course, Newton. The synthetic method, in contrast, exemplified by work in mathematics, 'begins with arbitrarily chosen definitions from which it deduces consequences by logical means' (p. 12). Allison brings out with particular clarity the complex dynamics engendered by the combination of Kant's rationalist heritage with his insistence that '[t]he true method of metaphysics is basically the same as that introduced by Newton' (U: 286). How, for example, should we understand Kant's views on the observed event, or 'immediate and self-evident consciousness' which serves as the equivalent of Newton's empirical observations, i.e. as the point from which philosophy should regress? (p. 12).

The second, and closely connected, issue emphasised by Allison is the relationship between logic and the broader idea of grounding: as he notes, the rationalist tradition effectively analyses the latter in terms of the former, and Kant initially follows this, albeit it with some variation as to the nature of the logical principles involved (p. 15). The evolution of Kant's work in this regard has been widely discussed, but Allison's informative discussion provides a helpful framework. This is particularly the case with respect to the key essay on negative magnitudes, which constitutes a crucial step in the disengagement process from rationalism by forcing the issue of non-logical grounding and opposition (NG: 171; 203). As Allison notes, the issue here is tightly interwoven with the question of method: in many ways this essay represents 'a last-ditch attempt to deal with the concept of a real ground within the framework of the analytic model of cognition' (p. 22).

The third strand of the pre-Critical analysis concerns Kant's growing awareness of the need for a fundamental split between two kinds of content: intuition and concepts. Kant famously invokes this in KrV to distinguish himself from both rationalism and empiricism conceived of reductionist projects operating in favour of one class or the other (KrV: A271/B327). Allison argues that the key developmental moment here is the widely discussed Reflexion 5037 (Refl. 18:69) which identifies 1769 as having given 'great light'. For Allison, what Kant saw that year was precisely the 'discursivity thesis', or the irreducibility of the two

classes of content and the central need for some story about their cooperation (p. 47) . In contrast, Allison suggests, convincingly I felt, that it is wrong to use that note’s reference to ‘an illusion of the understanding’ as the basis for attributing a ‘clear recognition of the antinomial problem’ to Kant at that stage (p. 49).

Bringing these points together, we arrive at some of the basic parameters of the Transcendental Analytic: an acceptance of multiple forms of content and the need for a story as to their interaction; an awareness that real grounds need a non-rationalist explanation; and an underlying recognition that these issues can only be treated in the context of a radically new methodology. Some of Allison’s historical claims will doubtless attract vigorous responses from scholars concerned with the relevant sub-issues: for example, he is harsh on those who cast Tetens as ‘model’ for Kant’s picture of the imagination (p. 157). But I found the broad story he tells about Kant’s development insightful. This holds both at the granular level (for example, the status of ‘symbolic cognition’ in the *Dissertation* at pp. 63-5 or p. 297 on the phrase ‘*Bewußtsein überhaupt*’), and with respect to the larger trajectory of Kant’s thought (for example, Allison offers a neat alternative to Carl’s reading of apperception in the *Duisburg Nachlass*, playing down the links to rational psychology, pp. 121-30).

This brings me to the Deduction itself: Allison goes through both editions, at times almost line by line. As stated, though, I will focus on the B version. One immediate virtue of his approach is that he swiftly sets aside readings which have little merit and yet which often clog up the debate: for example, that Kant simply equates the categories with the logical forms of judgment, or that KrV’s talk of apperception somehow rests on the kind of Cartesian self which the Paralogisms attack shortly after (p. 171; p. 246). The basic structure of the argument for him follows Henrich’s now standard ‘two steps in one proof’ model (p. 327). The ‘first step argues that the categories are rules for the *thought* of an object of sensible intuition in general’ (original emphasis, pp. 328-9): Kant is thus able to ‘conduct this analysis on the minimalist assumption that some data are given, without considering how they are given, e.g., as in space and time’ (p. 7). The second step then switches the focus to the specific forms of intuition identified in the Aesthetic. There are two crucial reasons for this. On the one hand, there is a danger that those forms might be in tension with the demands of the understanding: indeed, ‘the overall goal of the Deduction is to remove the worry that what is given in sensible intuition might not conform to the categories’ (p. 328). On the other hand, attention to those forms allows us to identify certain distinctive modes of intuitive unity which are not only compatible with category deployment, but actually require it.

So, for example:

[T]he necessity of representing entities and occurrences as occupying determinate positions in a single time, unlike unifying them on the basis of the categories alone, is not imposed upon them by the nature of the understanding, but by the nature of time.
(p. 388)

The Aesthetic thus functions as a second source of pressure mandating category use, albeit in some type of pre-discursive mode (p. 329). Allison's overall view of the B Deduction seems to me a plausible one; it is not that distant from that defended by commentators such as Longuenesse (for example, Longuenesse 1998, p.243), with many of the differences hanging on the details of texts such as B160-1n. At an exegetical level, it allows him to do a good job of ironing out the *prima facie* non-sequiturs any Kant interpreter is faced with. Allison sees many of these as stemming from ambiguities in the notion of objecthood (e.g. pp. 353-4), and this seems exactly right to me: the Deduction is effectively an extended argument that seeks to move between various non-equivalent notions of objecthood by appealing to their relations to other unities, in particular the spatio-temporal unity of the Aesthetic, and the unities of consciousness and of judgment.

It is now time to offer some assessment of Allison's arguments themselves. As he notes, Kant gives multiple formulations of the Deduction's goals, not all of which are obviously equivalent. In what follows I will assume that its central aim is to 'demonstrate the necessary conformity of appearances to the categories, which would establish their a priori objective validity for all appearances and only for appearances' (p. 434; similarly p. 328).

The first aspect of Allison's argument that I wish to discuss concerns the role of empirical cognition. Crudely, Kantian concepts serve several related functions. Most obviously, they are piece of generic content, representations of the 'characteristic marks' of things, through which we order intuitions in line with a series of inferential or proto-inferential 'rules' (Refl.16:300; KrV:A106; A126). So, for example, an ox can have a 'clear representation', understood phenomenologically, of some property of its stall, such as having a door (SvF: 59). This is the basis for both differential reaction (the ox would behave differently in a stall with no door), and for association (the ox becomes anxious or excited depending on past experiences with doors). What distinguishes concepts:

[D]oes not consist in the fact that that which is a characteristic mark of the thing is clearly represented, but rather in the fact that it is recognized [*erkannt*] as a characteristic mark of the thing. (SvF: 59)

This recognition entails both an awareness of the mark as an iterable property and an awareness of a set of implications as grounded in it: for example, insofar as I conceptualise something as a door, I must either attribute further properties to it, or revisit the initial attribution (KrV: A106). It is in this sense that the *Logic* identifies marks as both ‘in the thing [*Ding*]’ and as a ‘partial representation...considered as the ground of cognition’ (Log.:58). In virtue of these features, mark recognition imposes a normative order on experience, preventing it from being ‘haphazard’ (KrV: A104). More broadly, conceptuality implies at least a tacit awareness of the distinction between inferences putatively grounded in the ‘thing’ and other ways of combining representations, such as association, which are not so grounded. In this sense ‘judgment is nothing other than the way to bring given cognitions to the objective unity of apperception’, allowing me ‘to say that the two representations are combined in the object’ (KrV: B141-2). Finally, to conceptualise is be aware, again if only tacitly, that insofar as an inference is presumptively objective, as opposed to being merely artefact of my own psychological history, it should hold for any other observer, ‘regardless of any difference in the condition of the subject’ (KrV:B141-2). Thus:

The representation of the manner in which various concepts (as such) belong to a consciousness (in general, not only my own), is judgment. (Refl.16:633).

Or as Allison puts it:

[T]he basic idea is that in predicating a property or set of properties of some object x, I am implicitly expressing an epistemic ought, claiming that the predication holds not only for me in my present perceptual situation but for any observer, which makes it objectively valid. (p. 441)

These lines of thought raise familiar textual problems; particularly, with respect to the relation between the *Prolegomena* and the B Deduction. Allison provides a plausible treatment of those issues (pp. 362-70), although many readers will doubtless have their own preferred fixes for the many fine-grained exegetical issues here. But what I want to focus on is the argument that Allison offers from these facts about conceptuality to the categories.

[T]he crucial point is that, as rules, empirical concepts have a built-in normativity in the sense that their use presupposes something like an epistemic right to expect that whatever objects fall under the rule contain the properties that are expressed in the concept. (p. 442)

Now consider what, following Allison, I will call the ‘epistemic luck scenario’ (p. 236). On this scenario, the world exhibits a high degree of *de facto* stability: insofar as something is

cinnabar it can be counted on to stably instantiate all the properties implied – synthetically and analytically – by that mark. Such a world would seem ordered enough to support and sustain conceptual awareness: the worry Kant raises of radical disorder in passages such as KrV: A100-1 would be, as a matter of fact, misplaced. Yet the modality of this order is what Allison calls merely ‘hypothetical’ or ‘conditional’: if we are to employ concepts, the world must be like x and it is indeed like x . And this is no different essentially from the following: if we are to breathe the atmosphere must contain oxygen – and as a happy matter of happy fact, it does so. Now, one of Allison’s key claims is that there is something deeply problematic about this story – and that recognising this helps establish the necessity of the categories. This is because ‘epistemic luck scenario’:

[C]alls into question the normativity of empirical cognition by effectively reducing the conformity of appearances to the conditions of apperception to a matter of epistemological luck. (p. 437)

Allison’s contention here is effectively that ‘empirical concepts/rules presuppose a priori ones’ (p. 237): if the lucky scenario is incompatible with empirical cognition, and if empirical cognition is indeed possible, it must be that the categories make it so by guaranteeing some stronger form of order than the de facto stability which the scenario envisages. So when I make an assertion about cinnabar:

[T]he essential point is that the empirical truth of this and similar claims, i.e., judgments of experience, presuppose that nature as a whole (*natura formaliter spectata*) is governed by universal laws, which ground the possibility (though not the empirical truth) of such projections and warrant requiring the assent of others. Moreover, in order to preclude the contingency that would undermine normativity as such, and not merely the validity of a particular judgment or candidate for empirical law, these universal laws must have a transcendental ground, which we have seen Kant locates in the categories (p. 443)

Elsewhere he frames it in terms of an ‘epistemic right’, grounded in our conceptualising practice.

The essential point is that as rules concepts are themselves normative in the sense that they involve a kind of epistemic right to expect that whatever objects fall under the rule contain the properties that are expressed in the concept-rule and to require that other cognizers, who possess the concept, will agree with one’s judgment. (p. 237)

Given this, Allison concludes, there is a ‘performative, though not a logical impossibility’, in regarding ‘the uniformity of nature were regarded as merely contingent’ (p. 443). In short, if we accept the use of empirical concepts, we must further accept the categories which underpin them; the order on which they rely cannot be down to mere luck.

Such arguments are important both because of their immediate claims and because of their broader implications. For example, the ‘oxygen’ model sketched fits neatly with Guyer’s realist account of the a priori. On this, the aim is to demonstrate a priori limitations on our cognitive apparatus such that we can only encounter objects insofar as they exhibit property *x*: we could thus know a priori that this property will be exhibited by any and all objects of our experience, and yet the ground for this, our cognitive restrictions, is evidently compatible with their being *x* quite independently of us (Guyer 1987, p. 363). But my concern is with the categories, rather than idealism, and here Allison’s argument faces an immediate worry, one eloquently articulated by Cassam:

It is, throughout, an unargued assumption of Kant’s that there should, in effect, be some guarantee that appearances will fit into the ‘connected whole of human knowledge’, but it is surely appropriate to wonder whether a guarantee on this matter ought to be sought. There are two distinct questions to be considered in the present context: what must appearances be like if they are to provide a basis for the unity of consciousness? Secondly, why are appearances such as to provide for the unity of consciousness? The first of these, it may be granted, is a legitimate philosophical question, but it is far from clear that the second is a question with which philosophy is obliged to concern itself. (Cassam 1987, p. 370)

To put it another way, the Humean, broadly construed, can agree that were the world radically disordered, empirical cognition would be impossible – but why does this differ from the link between oxygen and life? Why do we need to invoke the categories to *guarantee* causal order? Allison talks of a ‘performative’ incoherence in this line of thought, but that seems too strong: there is none of the difficulty in understanding the lucky scenario that we encounter with, say, Moore’s paradox.

What of our ‘epistemic right’? Allison’s idea presumably is that since such order is so integral to the operation of our rational capacities, we can demand it of the world. But he faces three challenges. First is it really so integral? Underlying Allison’s view is presumably the point that, lacking the strict universality which comes only with necessity, the luck of the lucky scenario is bound to run out some time. Yet almost every human practice functions

despite case of failure or anomaly, and it is hard to see why, a picture on which order, being merely de facto, failed in one in a billion cases should be so radically threatening? Of course, if such order failed consistently and radically, that would be another matter – but the Humean can simply agree with this: it is just another way of making the oxygen point. Second, Allison's argument places enormous weight on the distinctive and inflationary account of concept use Kant offers. Is it really plausible that unreflective agents are committed to such a series of metaphysical implications simply by being able to recognise generic properties? Suppose any breakdown in the merely de facto order will arrive only in the far future: is this fact really sufficient to undermine current practices of discourse and concept application? To put the point from a historical angle, Allison's reading damages the Deduction as a transcendental argument. This is because Hume will not accept its premise: he will argue, as Berkeley does, that there is no need to postulate anything like Kantian empirical concepts in the first place – all that is needed is a tendency to associate groups of particular images (Hume 1978:1.1.7.7-8). Of course, Hume may be wrong about that. But it seems reasonable to prefer approaches on which the categories are shown to be necessary for something that is not itself a philosophical hypothesis, but rather a basic datum of any recognisably human awareness of the world: 'no one', Kant states, will fail to recognise the difference between the ship and the house case (KrV: A190/B235). Third, Allison's approach threatens to rely on idealism in a fashion that is surely too quick. My supposed epistemic right that the world behaves is at root an epistemic demand, and it is unclear why the world should be (honour bound?) to satisfy that. Simply responding 'because it is the world as it is for us' is not good enough when the alleged incoherence of the lucky scenario remains far from obvious.

The second issue to be discussed concerns Allison's account of apperception. As he reads it, Kant's claim in passages such as KrV: B131-2 is effectively that there exists a necessary possibility:

So considered, Kant holds with Leibniz (and against Descartes and Locke) that the 'I think' need not actually accompany all one's representations, while insisting (against Leibniz) that it must be able to accompany them, at least insofar as these representations are to enter into cognition. In short, though denying that every cognitively significant representation must be apperceived, he maintains that it must be apperceptible. (p. 336)

Yet it is unclear to me why we should be so confident. This is motivated partly by familiar post-Freudian concerns, and partly by the fact that Kant's vision of apperception bundles

together many features which seem separable: for example, a kind of direct first person perspective, and the sophisticated representational capacity given by concepts. Consider Moran's case of someone who harbours negative beliefs about her father, and yet is able to access these only from a third person perspective, by drawing inferences from her own behaviour and not by considering the facts about the man and his acts (Moran 2001, p. 85). Such representations would be cognitively significant and yet not apperceptible. One might object that the case is unrealistic, or that all Kant needs is the bare possibility that the subject might regain first personal awareness and deliberative control of these states (Moran himself of course sees the example as a kind of limit case). But Allison gives us no direct basis for this guarantee. Even granting such a response, this dialectic suggests that, given the widespread nature of implicit biases, the really important issue is not the necessary possibility of apperception, but how and why it is actually operative in particular cases. More broadly, it was at times unclear to me how much work Allison wants apperception to do. Crudely put, the strategic worry is this: the tighter 'the reciprocity between the unity of consciousness and the consciousness of unity' becomes the less space there is for the relationship to be genuinely mutually explanatory. Yet, as Allison is highly aware, this link needs to be extremely tight if one is to avoid characterising apperception in a way that reintroduces Cartesian themes at the heart of the Critical enterprise (p. 275; p. 340). I was unclear exactly how he ultimately proposes to walk this tight rope.

The third topic I want to discuss concerns a systemic blindspot in the monograph. The last ten years have seen a huge amount of work on Kant and nonconceptualism. This has obvious and direct implications for the structure of KrV. It is also vital if Kant is to avoid certain basic stumbling blocks. Consider a dog trained to run to the corner of the room, navigating past chairs and tables, and to pick up the smaller of two sticks there: the fact that the dog can perceive spatial relations strikes me as more certain than any argument which might emerge from the *Critique*. Yet if Kant is to avoid problems with such a simple case, he must have some way of allowing animals to perceive and intuit, whilst preserving the view that certain forms of spatio-temporal awareness require the categories. Allison deals with some of these matters in passing (for example, pp. 417-8), although it is hard to see what sense he can really make of the animal case (consider, e.g., p. 419). But his treatment is continually impaired by two features. First, he just assumes that the Deduction and nonconceptualism, understood as the view that beings without concepts might have perception or empirical intuition, are incompatible (p. 418) – and that this rules

nonconceptualism out of court (there are complex issues regarding the definition of ‘perception’ which I cannot discuss here, but the basic point stands). I agree that were the two really in tension, the latter would have to go. Yet the relationship is much more complex than Allison seems to realise, and both Allais and I have recently argued, on separate grounds, for their compatibility (Allais 2011; Golob 2016a). Second, the book often reads as if the last decade of Kant scholarship never happened. Not only is there no real treatment of nonconceptualism – probably the topic which has attracted more KrV-focussed research articles than any other in this period – there is no interest at all in any of the broader connections established between the Deduction and contemporary philosophy of mind (for example, with respect to the multiple non-equivalent ways of characterising conceptual content or the implications of relationalist as opposed to representationalist theories of perception). There are, of course, many, many ways of doing the history of philosophy – and there are few scholars alive who have a better claim to set their own course than Allison. But I raise the point because these omissions do create problems: Allison is in effect deprived of a whole range of sophisticated interlocutors who would have challenged or pushed his views in important ways. For example, Allais’s groundbreaking 2009 article on nonconceptualism fails to even make the bibliography, as do all of Hanna’s, as do the key works on the conceptualist side such as those by Ginsborg. It is simply not good enough, I am afraid, that the only real engagement with Allais’s work in a book that is effectively on the relationship between concepts and intuitions should come in a few lines describing her position on idealism as ‘understandable, albeit somewhat too facile’ (p. 285).

The final topic I want to cover is the role of time in Allison’s argument. There are some issues at the micro-level here which are important. For example, the A deduction states that:

Every intuition contains a manifold in itself, which however would not be represented as such if the mind did not distinguish the time in the succession of impressions on one another; for as contained in one moment no representation can ever be anything other than absolute unity. (KrV: A99)

This opaque passage is important because the status of instantaneous perception is closely linked to the Analogies and the key question of how one draws the distinction between a perception of succession and a succession of perceptions. Suppose, for example, that, having seen an image of a roof and then a door, I next simply step back and see the whole house and thus the two together. This seems sufficient to establish that they do indeed exist

simultaneously and thus that my initial experience was merely a subjective succession – yet if this is sufficient, the risk is no category is necessary. Of course, one can try to introduce further sceptical worries (am I sure it is the same roof etc.?) but that seems ad hoc. The literature thus contains many complex analyses of A99, trying effectively to avoid the consequence just sketched without committing Kant to an implausible atomism. Allison's view, if I understand it correctly, is that the 'moment' in A99 is in fact a non-existent limit case:

[T]here is no contradiction for the simple reason that since, ex hypothesi, an instant or moment is not a part of time *nothing* is intuited in it, including an absolute unity. (p. 210)

This is not the place for a discussion of Kant's philosophy of perception or time-consciousness, but I was unconvinced by the little Allison said on this, and I am unclear how he would deal with the crude 'stepping back' example I just gave. And this brings me to the macro-level. As I read KrV, Kant's ultimate argument for the categories is closely tied to his account of time. Specifically, my view is that the successive nature of conscious awareness makes the representation of certain relations deeply problematic. Some of these relations are themselves temporal – for example the relation of objective succession discussed in the Second Analogy. Others are mereological – for example, the part-whole relations discussed in the Axioms. Kant's first claim is that even the sceptic, even Hume, assumes the ability to represent such relations; his second claim is that the categories are conditions on doing so (Golob 2016b). From a transcendental perspective, this has obvious advantages: unlike Allison's argument from conceptuality, the premises are ones which Hume can be shown to already accept. Allison differs from this approach in multiple ways. For example, when he does argue directly from intuition to the categories, he sees the pre-discursive unity of both space and time, rather than time's successive nature, as doing the work (p. 387). I am hesitant about this, partly since it is unclear what such pre-discursive unity amounts to (we have a good grip, I think, on the sophisticated unities envisioned by something like Newtonian science and on the simple awareness of space and time possessed by animals, but presumably Allison means neither of these). But, more importantly, I am perfectly happy to embrace the result that, given the central role of time and the fact that the relevant relations are only treated in detail in the Principles, the Deduction is at best a strategic overview for a set of arguments that start earlier and finish later. Allison, in contrast, is officially committed to resisting any such downgrading of the Deduction (p. 425). One of the many virtues of his

magisterial account is that by setting out the resources of the Deduction in such detail, we can now better evaluate its role in the actual arguments of the Critique: be it as ‘crown jewel’ (p.425) or as propaedeutic.*

Abbreviations

References are to *Kants’ gesammelte Schriften* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1900–; abbreviated as Ak.). For *KrV*, however, I employ the standard A/B pagination.

- KrV *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* (Ak., vol. 4)
Log. *Logik* (Ak., vol. 9)
NG *Versuch, den Begriff der negativen Größen in die Weltweisheit einzuführen* (Ak., vol. 2)
Refl. *Reflexion* (Ak., vol. 14-19)
SvF *Die falsche Spitzfindigkeit der vier syllogistischen Figuren erwiesen* Ak., vol. 2)
U *Untersuchung über die Deutlichkeit der Grundsätze der natürlichen Theologie und der Moral* (Ak., vol. 2)

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